

Twenty-four years ago today along with the rest of my basic training flight we woke up to our first full day in the Air Force. It only seems fitting to retire on the anniversary of that day.

An Air Force career can be described as a journey. A journey in time and place including training schools, overseas and stateside assignments, TDY's, and deployments. My journey was not all that different from someone else's journey except that it was mine.

I remember our days at Rhein Main when the hostages were first taken in Iran ...then the unspeakable joy when the hostages landed at Rhein Main after their release and the crowds that gathered filled with American pride.

Then on to Little Rock AFB to witness another Cold War era milestone. The closing of a strategic missile wing and demolition of fourteen missile silos. I remember members of that missile wing that had spent their entire careers at Little Rock. Their lifework had just been turned into rubble. But in reality they had fought the good fight and peace prevailed, and the wall came down.

Then on to Scott AFB and Military Airlift Command Headquarters. The opportunity to levy Chaplain Service deployment taskings, one of the first times since Vietnam, and to send Chaplain Service personnel to operation Just Cause and Panama, then later, the initial buildup for Operation Desert Shield. The idea of initiating the process that sends those into harms way still gives me pause.

Then on to Lajes Field, Azores, where one of the most distinct memories was watching the first President Bush on our one TV channel enjoy a Thanksgiving dinner with all the fixings with the troops in the desert, the supplies for which had been brought to the desert by the air and sea lift originally destined for the Azores. Canned food never tasted so good.

At Altus AFB OK, I had the opportunity to deploy to the desert where I witnessed firsthand people of faith being on a waiting list to attend worship at the American Embassy. A truly meaningful and gratifying experience.

Then to Randolph AFB. Probably the most rewarding activity was putting on the Air Force Singles conference, a program specifically for Air Force members. I'll never forget a young woman coming up to me at the singles conference in Colorado, and saying, Sgt Butterfield this conference was just what I needed to help me get my life straight.

Thank you. It's times like these I will always treasure.